

Deciphering Pocahontas: Unpackaging the Commodification of a Native American Woman

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□—*This essay examines the commodification of Pocahontas surrounding the 1995 Disney film Pocahontas. Through an examination of Pocahontas products and popular cultural discourses about Pocahontas, the essay develops a theory of the "cipher" as a late-capitalist commodity form. Theorization of the cipher helps explain how companies market a field of goods in relationship to a single product, such as a film. Marketing campaigns draw on generic forms and figures that can be easily reproduced and identified. Furthermore, through the marketing of Pocahontas goods and popular discourses, Disney and the general mainstream commodity culture construct a market for children versus parents. And while the commodity world of Pocahontas uses utopic appeals to sell products, through their appropriation of feminism and Native American culture and history, Pocahontas products and discourses contribute to the material oppression of women and Native Americans, generally, and Native American women in particular.*

GIVEN the proliferation of advertising images, television channels, and movie theaters; the move from a multinational to a transnational standard of commodity exchange; highly publicized corporate oligopolistic mergers; faster and more complex information technologies; and a continuing and growing divide between rich and poor inside and outside of the

United States, it is no wonder that contemporary media critics have *once again*, recently turned attention back to material concerns in analyzing mass media (e.g., Cloud, 1994; Cloud, 1996; Cloud, 1998; Greene, 1998; Stabile, 1995).¹ In a cultural context in which people often describe their identities as fragmented and commercial media correspondingly use partial bodies in place of whole ones (e.g., talking heads, manicured hands, nylon-clad legs, and painted lips), we, too, think it important to address the relationship between media and the material world. In this essay, we do this by placing "a drag" on *high velocity popular culture*, (Harrison, 1996, p. 246) primarily by considering processes of commodification. Concomitantly, we attempt to map out the overlapping and interlocking

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materialities of race, gender, sexuality, and nation (Greene, 1998).²

It was in thinking about these issues and others, such as changing advertising strategies and the uncomfortably long invasive reach of advertisers into the spaces of everyday life, that one of us had a particularly memorable confrontation with commodity culture. While Disney's *Pocahontas* still played in theaters nationwide, one morning a Burger King Pocahontas drink cup appeared outside our apartment as we were on our way to work. The next day, another cup appeared. The next, a french fry container featuring Governor Ratliff, the movie's arch-villain, made its way onto the doorstep. Though litter is commonly understood to be unusable waste material, *this* brightly-colored fast-food packaging was still doing its job of selling Burger King *and* Pocahontas, even in trash form.

Though the film did successfully bring audiences to theaters, albeit not in record numbers as some forecasters had predicted,³ Disney's contemporary selling strategy was busy doing much more.⁴ Now a staple of the marketing industry, the Disney corporation mounted an in-your-face promotional campaign and, by doing so, profited more from the sale of Pocahontas products and the sale of rights to its movie designs and logos to other companies than it did from the sale of theater tickets.⁵ As one commentator suggested, Disney's licensing agreements with other companies to package Pocahontas promised the company "unprecedented ubiquity" (Stanley, 1995, p. 6),⁶ ubiquity enough, it seems, to have provided us repeated chance (yet unavoidable) encounters with different pieces of advertising trash.

Despite the mainstream press's over-

all adulation of Disney's marketing "performance," as cultural critics studying this phenomenon, our attention turns toward issues of commodification. In order to understand the commodification of Pocahontas, we became familiar with the world of Pocahontas commodities and popular discourses about Pocahontas by immersing ourselves in them. Then, we asked several questions about the marketing and selling of Pocahontas products, such as: How are products made into commodities? How do objects without value come to have value? How do advertisers "attract attention" to the goods they market? Besides the film, what does advertising discourse about Pocahontas sell? And what material issues are being covered over by the media's focus on Pocahontas? To begin to answer such questions, we focused our attention on both the product's commodity form and popular discourse about the figure of Pocahontas.

In this essay, we describe a particular commodification process and the way it functions within contemporary culture by defining and theorizing the concept of the *cipher*. We argue that Pocahontas served as a basic figure and form for a variety of products and discourses within a much larger commodity field. The film *Pocahontas* itself was central to this construction of Pocahontas, but in this essay we concern ourselves with commodities other than the film.⁷ By analyzing commercially available goods, television advertisements, newspaper articles, and other commodities, we hope to illustrate a process by which Pocahontas was used to sell products. Furthermore, we illustrate the specific nature of U.S. culture's tendency to appropriate, transform, and then (almost obsessively) reproduce figures and forms through

the production of commodities. In the case of Pocahontas, as well as with the marketing of many other products, we argue that the cipher is the mechanism by which commodity culture thematizes concepts, such as Pocahontas, and via this process, markets myriad products to consumers.

Initially, it makes sense to think of the cipher as a blank slate, an empty container, an unwritten text, or an unornamented or unadorned figure—in short, perhaps, a free-floating signifier that ultimately is then filled with various meanings. In her study of Samuel Richardson's eighteenth-century character, Clarissa, Joy Kyunghae Lee (1995) draws on Gyorgy Lukacs's definition of the cipher in describing the insignificance of Clarissa, who she says "has no significance or value of her own . . . she is nothing but an empty container of meaning" (p. 46).⁸ However, this container metaphor and others like it fail to capture fully the fact that the cipher does not actually *contain* meaning; rather, meanings are ascribed to it.⁹ In Native American history, as well as in mainstream lore, the figure of Pocahontas existed long before Disney appropriated her for its own purposes. Pocahontas was not an empty shell of meaning prior to being imported into mainstream U.S. commodity culture. Indeed, the figure of Pocahontas was meaningful in Native American history and culture, but just because Pocahontas had meaning within Native American societies does not mean that history *inherited* within the figure of Pocahontas itself. Thus, when Disney *imported* the figure of Pocahontas into mainstream commodity culture and reshaped it, new meanings were ascribed to the figure of Pocahontas and most older meanings were lost.¹⁰ Through the process of anima-

tion in which visual products are made,¹¹ Disney constructed an easily reproducible visual form, or cel, and used it to market myriad products, in effect replacing the history of a Native American woman with that of an animated figure. Thus, Disney transformed the story of a real person into a line of marketable objects.

During the importation process, certain aspects of the figure of Pocahontas central to Native American culture, history, and tradition were omitted prior to the resignification of the figure within the context of the larger mainstream commodity culture.¹² This illustrates an aspect of the cipher a generic dictionary definition of the word suggests: a cipher can be "a method to transform a text to conceal meaning."¹³ So, a cipher may have meaning in one cultural context, but when imported for use in another wholly different context, the substance of a cipher may be altered dramatically. The processes of appropriation and commodification of Pocahontas made it possible to recast the figure of a Native American woman within a western, capitalist frame. Through discourses such as ads, products, and newspaper articles, a particular construction of the figure of Pocahontas began to take shape. Our emphasis in this essay is not on the historical figure of Pocahontas within Native American communities, but on the subsequent reconstitution of the figure of Pocahontas within mainstream U.S. culture. With the right packaging, among many other things, the figure of Pocahontas helped market myriad products, social identities, and even histories to consumers. Indeed, within the mainstream commodity world, Pocahontas even appeared as "a meaning system in itself" (Urla & Swedlund, 1995, p. 279). By ignoring the histori-

cal context of the originary figure, and by disregarding and dishonoring the traditional culture in which it has historically had meaning, a cipher such as Pocahontas can be used simultaneously to market the film *Pocahontas*, to sell fast food from Burger King, and to popularize a sexual and exoticizing image of Native American women. This fact distinguishes the function of the cipher from what we commonly understand to be a commodity.

While a commodity has value as a product and as a social concept (e.g., when one buys lipstick, one purchases both a useful type of makeup and a signifier of "beauty"),¹⁴ a cipher is a figure through which various commodities with multiple exchange values are marketed, *and* it is a social concept that circulates like a commodity. Thus, when one purchases a Pocahontas doll, one buys a commodity *and* a part of the commercialized world of Pocahontas. Commodities and ciphers mutually support one another in a feedback loop in which the cipher imbues the commodity with a particular kind of value, while the purchase of the commodity in the context of an entire field of related commodities further strengthens the overall desirability of products associated with the cipher. In this particular study, the cipher helps market the persona of a once real, live person, versus, for example, the persona of a fictional character such as Batman,¹⁵ which can also function as a cipher.

As we have suggested thus far, in the case of Pocahontas the cipher was not originally "empty"; it had originary meaning bound by the forces of a specific history, but through the process of appropriation, resignification, and commodification, the refiguration or *encipherment* of Pocahontas rendered possible a newly constituted figure. As a

figure rewritten over and over again, the cipher becomes an emblem of late-capitalist USA, helping to undergird the contemporary state of a culture saturated with products. Examining the cipher of Pocahontas is only one way to make meaning of commodity culture, but we think it is a useful one. We study the process by which the world of goods and products struggles to dominate daily experience by disseminating and thereby populating the consumer world with seemingly endless generic images, packages, and commodities focused around a unifying commodity form; specifically, in the particular case of Pocahontas, we study how that process is linked to the appropriation of Native American culture.

In the following pages, we attempt to decipher Pocahontas by developing the theory of the cipher, briefly describing the field of commodity production, examining media discourses, and ultimately criticizing the appropriation of feminism and Native American culture. Pocahontas products and discourses tend to collapse race, gender, ethnicity, and class through the recyclable, reproducible, and replaceable Pocahontas images, rendering these aspects of social identity and experience epiphenomenal to the overall act of consumption.

Cipher—A Late Twentieth-Century Commodity Form

The cipher attains taken-for-grantedness when it, itself, becomes the referent for each new product associated with it. Each product, therefore, is a "buy-in" to the larger cultural phenomenon of Pocahontas, while each new product line reconfirms the core significance of the cipher. Hence, the cipher

is a metonym, a single member of the class of entities like it and simultaneously a referent for the sum total of all entities in its class. The cipher complicates many critical approaches to mass communication because it shifts attention away from images, representations, and products to the *process* by which images, representations, and products come to have meaning. As products and discourses proliferate, so do the cipher's meanings and our understandings of them. Unlike any given product associated with it, however, the cipher is the culminating effect of various discourses surrounding commodities marketed around a common theme.

Though we might replace "historical" with "rhetorical," or use both in the following passage, we nonetheless second Stephen M. Fjellman's (1992) pronouncement that "the central historical process of the twentieth century is the triumph of the commodity form—nowhere more so than in the home of the free and the land of the brave" (p. 5). In talking about commodity forms, we are not discussing the mid-eighteenth-century triumph of exchange value over use value Karl Marx studied. We are also not discussing the twentieth-century commodity produced in response to burgeoning industrialization in which the supply of particular goods (such as weapons) outstripped demand that Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno (1944/1988), and Guy DeBord (1983) examined. Nor are we discussing the commodities resulting from the efficiencies of Fordism and Taylorism. Nevertheless, we do not insist the process of the cipher is altogether new. Instead, we are suggesting that what may be at least contemporary about the cipher is

the dislocation of the referent from any single material object.

In fact, *the cipher itself is the referent*; products refer to it, and its existence depends on its relationship to a field of products. Hence, the cipher is an effect of the many images and discourses referencing it. Walter Benjamin's (1936/1969) famous essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," called attention to the cultural change brought about by photography and, consequently, the reproduction of images. The technology of photography meant, for instance, that one no longer needed to be in the direct presence of an artistic "masterpiece" in order to experience the aura of "the original," since photographs, themselves, provided for the experience of an aura. We argue that products that proliferate around a common figure, all of which cite and contribute to the meaning and significance of that figure, are even further removed from an original than Benjamin theorized in his day. So, while Benjamin focused on individual photographs as reproductions of originals, his early twentieth-century perspective could not account for the immense dispersion of images and discourses around a common figure that seems almost definitive of late twentieth-century commodity culture. Donald M. Lowe (1995) has made a similar observation about the relevance of Benjamin's point today in writing that "the issue is no longer the mechanical reproduction of the original and the loss of the aura of the original. . . . We have gone far beyond that in recontextualization of the image, by means of its combination and recombination with other images and signs" (p. 58). Our argument here is that the "combination and recombination with other images and signs" when

specifically focused around a particular figure that is used to market myriad products and social meanings constitutes a cipher, and it is the cipher that helps us make sense of commodification processes surrounding the figure of Pocahontas.

The ubiquity of Pocahontas commodities occurs because marketers promote Pocahontas as a visually pleasurable image and discursive object, a socially valued cultural phenomenon, and a purchasable good (such as a toy, book, or record). Ultimately, the cipher produces a beautiful order, a self-contained symbolic world, a new-fangled system of langue and parole as applied not to language (or to cinema) but to the generic world of products and discourse. Each product and each utterance plays its proper role as a legitimating citation for the commodity system as a whole. The construction of the cipher is a cyclical process that cannot exist outside of the world of products since it depends on all of the products of which it is simultaneously a member and its chief representative. The field widens further to encompass all references to Pocahontas, the continual re-creation of Pocahontas as a totem of mainstream popular culture and ultimately of historical common sense. At these sites, Pocahontas appears as everything from life-size Pocahontas and John Smith cardboard figures without faces into which kids' heads are to be put to David Letterman's *Late Night Show* reference to a date purchased by Charlie Sheen as "Poca-hooker"; from Baskin Robbin's ice cream party cake, with Meeko braiding a kneeling Pocahontas's hair, to Mel Gibson (voice for the film's John Smith) describing Pocahontas as "a babe." Pocahontas refers to all the products and citations that carry her

name—from "Poca-hooker" to "Native American Barbie" to a toy that comes with the purchase of a Burger King Kid's meal. With each new detail, our sense of Pocahontas changes from simply being something consumable to being something the sole purpose of which is to be consumed.

The Commodity Field of Pocahontas

In order to provide a sense of the scope and number of Pocahontas products marketed to consumers we offer a lengthy description of what is only a small portion of Pocahontas commodities produced. Our definition of *marketed products* includes not only material objects that have various uses and functions, but also mass media objects that can be *metaphorically consumed*, such as images that people watch (consume) in order to make sense of themselves as members of culture and society. We hope this discussion offers the reader a sense of the breath-taking number of Pocahontas goods marketed in the United States, as well as the experience we felt in focusing our attention on so many Pocahontas products.

Between 1995 and 1996, products related and unrelated to the production and distribution of the film focused on Pocahontas.¹⁶ A local¹⁷ bookstore, for instance, boasted more than a dozen Pocahontas books on a special display in the children's section—five Disney issues, including books called *Meeko's Busy Day* and *Destiny Calls*, two "flip picture" books, and more than seven books dedicated to the historical accuracy or fictional melodrama of Pocahontas.

A regional bookstore in a nearby larger city displayed more than twenty books, including read-along cassette

books, coloring books, as well as the conventional reading books.

And, Disney must have sold or provided marketing materials themselves, as one store window sported several ("life-sized") cardboard cut-outs. The number one selling soundtrack to the film, with Vanessa Williams singing "Colors of the Wind," sold at local record stores, including our Tower Records branch. Not only did stores stock the film soundtrack, and a version of songs sung by Vanessa Williams which played on video channels (Campbell, 1995), but they also sold sing-along soundtracks for children.¹⁸

Stores also sold several magazines about Pocahontas, including *Disney Adventures*, which introduces the characters. *Disney Adventures* is chock full of ads for Disney products and their tie-ins, a "sneak-preview" of scenes from the movie, discussions with voice-over actors, a discussion of animation, a discussion of the "real" history, a short story, an article/ad for Pocahontas cards, and finally "Powhatan Puzzlers."

The Disney Catalogue, a catalogue of Disney goods and apparel aimed more at adults than children, advertises a vested dress; a hunch tote; baby clothes; a pant set; a half-shirt with a fringe; a sweater with Pocahontas, Meeko, and Flit on it; a "Powhatan pencil case" with pencils, paper clips, theme erasers, and a pencil sharpener; a fleece jacket; two different backpacks; a "suede leather premier jacket"; a Pocahontas and Flit watch; a tee-shirt; a 21-inch by 42½-inch serigraph cel; a twill shirt; a scenic tee-shirt; a denim shirt; and a "family fleece" shirt. The Disney stores carried even more items, including plastic cups and plates, dolls, stuffed animals, tie-dye tee-shirts, Pocahontas hair, and several "natural"

items, such as paper desk pads with fake wood cases.

In an insert included in a Publisher's Clearinghouse mailing, Disney offered an activity set that included stickers, puzzles, connect-the-dots, a storybook, crossword puzzles, two coloring books, games, four soft-cover books, and eight non-toxic crayons. Disney also sold the video *Sing Along Songs: Pocahontas, Colors of the Wind*; cassette tapes; and *Pocahontas: Read Along*.

Besides its own direct marketing of Pocahontas, Disney spent \$125 million cross-marketing *Pocahontas* to other companies (Stanley, 1995). As a result, the number and kind of products available using images or words from the film or marketing discourse was extraordinary. Chrysler, Burger King, Nestlé ("Cool Creations" cups), General Mills, Payless, Mattel (playsets, action figures, "Toddler" figures, and "Forest Friends Plush Toys"), Hallmark (wrapping paper, bags, paper plates, cups, and the "Pocahontas Keepsake Ornament Collection"), Tiger (hand-held electronic games), Timex (girls' and boys' watches), Maui (a 7-foot jump rope, a cloth-covered hula hoop, and a ball), and Sunline (Pocahontas SweetTarts) all had licenses with Disney.

Pocahontas, while only the sixth tie-in movie for Burger King, was its most lucrative. Burger King sold eight million Pocahontas Kids Club meals a week (Gellene, 1995, p. D1). Tens of millions of Nestlé Crunch bars had scenes from the movie on them, and Payless was responsible for making sandals, moccasins, and athletic and hiking shoes (Stanley, 1995, p. 6).

Marvel Comics put out Disney's *Pocahontas* comic book, which basically tells the movie's narrative. On the last page is a "How to Draw Pocahontas"

lesson. In addition to telling us how to draw, it tells us "The tip of Pocahontas's nose should be very close to her upper lip." Then, it says at the bottom of the page, "If you'd like to learn more about drawing Pocahontas and her friends, be sure not to miss Disney's *How to Draw Pocahontas* available at arts and crafts stores everywhere!" and gives a number to call.

Department and grocery stores sold Pocahontas pocket portfolios and Pocahontas partyware (including plates, cups, napkins, invitations, and decoration material). They sold Pocahontas backpacks, pencils, pencil cases, pencil pouches, and study kits. They sold linens, including pillow cases, sleeping pillows, throw pillows, fitted sheets, bed spreads, comforters, blankets, valences, drapes, and a removable wall stick-up kit. They sold several types of tee-shirts and shorts, with and without fringes, hair accessories and jewelry, "dorm" shirts, moccasins, sandals, tennis shoes, and hiking boots. They sold Pocahontas plastic bags, cards, balloons, party horns, and hats. They sold paint and weave sets, face-painting sets, a native drum, and a cooking set (McNicholl, 1995). Some stores even gave away a Meeko doll. Other stores sold beach towels.

The mind-numbing list of products proclaiming connections to Pocahontas, which we only partially reproduce here, may begin to create the enervating feeling of being in the late twentieth-century world of consumerism, saturated by a field of products. Late twentieth-century commodity culture provides for a mobile experience, invades the social sphere, colonizes psychological space, and screams out to the consumer for attention. As Fjellman (1992) suggests:

The struggle for commodities, their vast numbers, the speed with which they pass before us, and the actions of those who cannot possess them all consume our energies. There is little time for sustained critique. We are tired: we need rest. We need, really need, soma. Thank God for plastic. (p. 10)

This (as one of our readers said) exhausting feeling of the world whizzing by is what Margaret Morse (1990) sees as an effect of "everyday distraction." We attempt to reproduce this experience here, if only partially, to draw attention to how the overabundance of the products marketed through the cipher of Pocahontas functions as a part of a particular quality of the contemporary commodity form we call the cipher.

Kid's Culture

Like Chuck E. Cheese, where "a kid can be a kid," ads for Pocahontas products were marketed specifically to children and draw on the "cult" aspect of kid's culture in their appeals. Advertising directed at children often uses such a strategy, seeing childhood, itself, as "a market, indeed, a highly profitable market" (Steiner, 1995, p. 343).¹⁹ We provide brief examples here to illustrate not only how Pocahontas ads directed their messages to children but also to suggest certain effects of the importation of Native American culture into the mainstream advertising media space.

Ads using the Pocahontas form abounded on television directed at children. For example, Burger King used Pocahontas to sell its Kid's Meal. Ads about the Kid's Meals direct themselves to kids, and not adults, by portraying kids as exciting and parents as boring. They also invite kids to be a part of Burger King's club, and for

both the film and the video campaign, Pocahontas was the hitch.

Burger King ads using Pocahontas to sell products often drew on kids' sense of adventure, gendering *and* racializing such messages by connecting boy's desires to the adventures of John Smith, with Pocahontas being the *adventure to be found*. The male voice-over for one advertisement says, "Pocahontas is playing everywhere. Every kid wants to be John Smith." Later in the ad, the voice-over announces, "And since John Smith found something magical on his journey [cut to a shot of Pocahontas], kids can find something magical too ... at Burger King ... where they can get these fun action toys, like Flit and Meeko." In addition to constructing a desire for the toys, the ad constructs a gendered and racialized white, blond male desire for finding and "having" a Native American woman. In each instance, whether selling hamburgers, the "free" toys that come with the purchase of Kid's Meals, the desire for Native American women, or simply the image of Native American women itself, the constructed desire revolves around consumption practices. While the ad also directs its message toward parents who could buy this toy for their children, desire for the products is primarily elicited from the child.

Interestingly, while Pocahontas products such as Burger King Kid's Meals may rely on the popularity of the Pocahontas phenomenon, even products not licensed by Disney and not labeled Pocahontas may be affected by the larger cultural intrigue surrounding Pocahontas. For example, the timely August 1995 issue of *The Great Kids Company* contains 52 pages of ads for kids' clothing and costumes and contains some ads for Native Americana. The advertising magazine, with a slick

cover and back, is filled with colorful pictures of smiling kids playing with products (e.g., Mighty Morphin Power Rangers' outfits, bead necklace kits, and furniture with kid's names painted on it), thus conjuring the fantasy world of children's play.

In the Native Americana spread, a light-skinned, brown-haired girl models the Native Americana costume for the camera and stands in front of a colorful tepee. The ad reads, "Great Kids Exclusive!: Native dress for role-playing fun" and next to the price the costume is identified as "Indian Princess." The first sentence of the description reads, "Realistic Native American dress transforms your child into an Indian princess." On the opposing page in the upper right hand corner a light-skinned boy wears a headdress and faux Native American apparel. Below and to the right of him a dark-skinned boy, possibly African American, stands next to a tepee exactly like the one pictured on the preceding page. The ad for the headdress says it is also for role playing: "your child will feel like a true leader in this beautiful Indian headdress," and the outfit worn by the other boy is the "Perfect outfit for the courageous warrior." Other products, such as suede moccasins, a pottery wheel, a Pocahontas playset, and miniature log buildings and tepees accompany these ads.

In this example, an advertisement encourages the purchase of (faux) Native American outfits for non-Native American children. Wearing Native American clothing is a "fun" way by which parents can imagine their non-Native American children as "playing" members of Native American communities with whom they may or may not ever have had any substantial contact. This construction of the Na-

tive American apparel detached from Native American cultural contexts encourages parents to imagine children playing Native Americans without input from Native Americans about what it means to be Native American and to rely on their own possibly limited understanding of and exposure to Native American history and culture in order to imagine scenarios for play. Such advertisements encourage those with purchasing power not to have their children get to know Native Americans better through personal contact but instead to "play" with the culture in places outside of where Native Americans live. The fact that the very same light-skinned models pose as the cowboy and cowgirl in a two-page spread following the one for Native Americana and also appear on the cover of the catalogue wearing the same cowgirl and cowboy outfits emphasizes the ease with which Native American identities can be put on and taken off as well as the interchangeable nature of such identities. In the catalogue, Native American identities and symbolically colonial identities of cowboys and girls are constituted as interchangeable. Like the Burger King ad, this catalogue draws on the popularity of Pocahontas in order to produce desires for kids to possess "Native American-ness."

The Pornographic "Native American Barbie"²⁰

While the world of products, as illustrated above, helped produce Pocahontas as cipher, popular discourse about Pocahontas also contributed to the construction of Pocahontas, significantly as a sexually desirable and reproducible commodity form.²¹ Because, given the nature of the cipher, it would be impossible to discuss all of the dis-

course about Pocahontas and all of the Pocahontas products, we invite readers to make connections among the products and discourses we examine here, as well as with their own experiences of Pocahontas as a cipher.

Unsurprisingly, because of their overall interest in Pocahontas as a reproducible figure, articles about Pocahontas very often focus on Pocahontas's similarity to a Barbie doll.²² They also tend to comment, in pornographic ways, on the gendered form of the figure. Little should surprise us about this fact. Stories abound about the history of the doll's "invention," some suggesting the original Barbie was modeled after a sex doll for men: Mattel got wind of the sales possibility and took the figure quite literally as impetus to create a doll for little girls.²³ The Barbie form is basic to the commodification of femininity in the U.S. and elsewhere (Boy, 1987; Ducille, 1994; Ebersole & Peabody, 1993; Lord, 1994; Rand, 1995; Thum, 1990; Urla & Swedlund, 1995). Certainly, Barbie's predominant historical construction as white and blonde, with many admitted contemporary exceptions to this rule, also makes the association with Pocahontas predictable, given the overall popular discourse's attempts to diminish the Native American-ness of Pocahontas and therefore to homogenize her with regard to mainstream U.S. culture.²⁴

Comparisons between Pocahontas and Barbie are replete in newspapers and magazines. In her *New York Times* article, Joyce Purnick (1995) compares Barbie to Pocahontas (B3). Janet Maslin (1995) describes the film *Pocahontas* as the "Bridges of Madison County for the Barbie set" (p. 46). In her column, Karen Grigsby Bates (1995) says, "Native people will probably sniff at the

pneumatic babe (picture a buckskin Barbie) with swinging tresses that the Disney machine chose to portray Pocahontas, but she is, undeniably, beautiful" (p. B7). Peter Travers (1995) says Pocahontas's "outfits sometimes make her look like Poca-Barbie" (p. 116). Laura Shapiro (1995) says, "And there's something strangely familiar about the Indian maid herself, tall and shapely in a buckskin minidress, with miles of floating hair: she's Native American Barbie" (p. 77).

Mattel entered 50 Pocahontas dolls, its largest line of dolls ever associated with a film, in the American International Toy Fair. A *New York Times* article quotes Lisa McKendall, manager of marketing communications for Mattel, which makes both Barbie and Pocahontas dolls, who says, "Short-haired dolls don't sell, except with little baby dolls, when bald is fine" (Louie, 1995, p. B4). A picture of the entire Pocahontas doll, with hair at least twice the volume of her body, appears as an inset.²⁵

But, the comparison of Pocahontas to Barbie is more literal than even these critics may have realized. In a *Los Angeles Times* article, Denise Gellene (1995) writes:

Margaret Whitfield, a toy industry analyst with Tucker, Anthony & Co. in New York, predicts El Segundo-based Mattel will take in about \$100 million from sales of *Pocahontas* toys, about the same it received from *Lion King* toys. But Mattel's *Pocahontas* line is potentially more profitable because *the dolls are made from existing Barbie molds*, Whitfield said. *Lion King* toys were designed from scratch. (p. D2, our emphasis)

Combined with comments about Pocahontas's similarity to Barbie were sexually graphic accounts discussing Pocahontas in pornographic language. Betsy Sharkey (1995) says Disney

turned "the 12-year-old Pocahontas into an animated Playboy playmate" (p. 1). An insert in Felicia R. Lee's (1995a) article reads, "Babe in the Woods: with its Harlequin-style history and buckskin-clad star, Disney's prettily romantic 'Pocahontas' is more of a fiction than any of its fairy tales" (p. 37).²⁶ Maslin (1995) says:

Fathers across America will soon be volunteering in record numbers to take the children to the movies, and here's why: Pocahontas is a babe. She's the first Disney animated heroine since Tinker Bell with great legs. . . . She's got aloe eyes, a rosebud mouth, billowing black hair and terrific muscle tone. And she is the centerpiece of a film that's as great-looking as its heroine. (p. 46)

Maslin, however, also suggests that part of the negative aspects of the film is the aging of "the brave and precocious Pocahontas from 12 or 13 into the flirty, full-grown vixen" (p. 46).²⁷

Many other articles focus on Pocahontas's body in sexualizing and often pornographic ways (e.g., Price, 1995; Morgenstern, 1995; Sterritt, 1995). The article with the most interest in her appearance and with bodily self-consciousness is Paul Rudnick's (1995) review in *Esquire*, which not only unabashedly analyzes Pocahontas's bodily form, but renders judgment of it over and over again. For example, he describes Pocahontas as "a politically polished überbabe, a Native American princess" and compares Pocahontas's body to other animated women's bodies. He writes, "Disney heroines, like those in *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Little Mermaid*, are usually spunky and pert, tossing their ringlets and fins and demanding library cards and legs. Pocahontas is far more lusciously sexual" (p. 67).

In her study of Clarissa, Lee (1995) writes:

For Clarissa, her commodity and her physical existence are not merely inseparable, but virtually identical. And the circulation of Clarissa's body as well as definitions of its significance do not lie in her control, but are determined by a pre-existing mechanized system that treats her only as an abstract quantity. (p. 47)

Thus, according to Lee, a cipher is a subject in which identity and the body function identically within a system that treats them as vessels to be filled with significance. As Lee writes, "Clarissa's body is nothing but a 'locus of imprints, marks, and mirage' of patriarchy" (p. 47). Indeed, the goal of production is to locate a subject who can embody certain idealized abstractions and who promises, through her representation, to bring those ideals to life.²⁸ And while feminist film theory has addressed this very issue of woman as a function, as a mechanism within ideology (e.g., Doane, 1989), what is important here is the fact not only that race and gender cathect around the organizing principle of Pocahontas in sexualized ways, but also that the cipher appears to us to be the basis of that organization. Moreover, the commodification of Pocahontas appears to be an emblem of contemporary capitalism not only in the way it functions but also in its ubiquity and ability to generate the generic form that sells. The product explosion regarding Pocahontas transitions her from Native American woman of contemporary colonial lore into a contemporary commodity form—a fragmented and empty body inscribed within contemporary codes of woman as sexual heroine supporting patriarchy.

Pocahontas, with her ever substitutable gendered form, may suggest to

women and children the physical and ideological forms they, themselves, ought to embody; but, Pocahontas is also an historical figure and is already dead. Thus, the contemporary making of Pocahontas into a piece of plastic (for fantasy and interpellation) also makes plastic the very identity granted to her by Disney.²⁹ In comparing Barbie with Pocahontas (or Native American Barbie), form, body, race, ethnicity, sex, and gender are all fetishized for consumer culture, further commodifying the Native American woman. This process effectively erases Native American identity from the form itself, while merely appearing to be based on a real Native American identity.

The Appropriation of Native American Culture

Disney interrupted its production of animated *fables*, such as *Cinderella* and *Beauty and the Beast*, with *Pocahontas* and by doing so translated *history* into animation—making history into fantasy and fable. Disney's thirty-third animated film *Pocahontas* is but the first that animates "real life" characters. In the process, the film depicts Pocahontas in the form of the fantasy of colonizers—a traditional, sacrificial, and "noble savage" who acts as a willing cultural liaison between colonizers and Native Americans. By telling the story of Pocahontas, and directing its appeals not to Native American audiences but to those outside of the Native American community, specifically non-Native American purchasers of tickets, products, and discourses in mainstream U.S. society, Disney effectively appropriates Native American culture and Native American history and transforms them into commodities.³⁰ Further, through their representation of Pocahontas, Disney commodities, other commodities, and

popular cultural discourses also appropriate feminism and use it in a way to forward a particular view of contemporary society. Together, they construct Pocahontas as a feminine, postfeminist, Native American woman—the strong athletic type who understands nature, animals, colonial relationships, and love, but, who, above all, ultimately wants the freedom to choose to be in a heterosexual romantic relationship and then to give that relationship up to serve her community, all as expressions of her newly found liberated independence. We were drawn to studying Pocahontas, in part, because of our philosophical and political opposition to Disney's (and others') long history of appropriating various liberation struggles and movements, such as its appropriation of Native American culture and feminism in this film.

Despite its attempt to tell a story about history, like the nineteenth-century world of the TV show *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*, the world of Pocahontas (or more accurately, the world of Disney) is a product of the contemporary political and social imaginary. Through cross-referencing marketing techniques, Disney products promise utopia and freedom in this fast-paced world of products with strategies that "appeal strongly to peoples' real needs in late capitalist society" (Fjellman, 1992, p. 10).³¹ Pocahontas promises to satisfy the need to end colonial history, racism, and sexism. Through images, it conjures up utopic hopes and desires, diverting attention away from the materiality of daily life, hence away from contemporary social problems. It takes a figure of importance from Native American history and transports her into contemporary U.S. mainstream commodity culture, telling a story of the past invented in the present. As

Ann L. Stoler (1995) suggests, current "Racial discourse is not opposed to emancipatory claims; on the contrary, it effectively appropriates them" (p. 90). Through its representations and commodity production, Disney appropriates the experience of oppression as if to end it, while simultaneously creating and sustaining new ways to oppress, thus in fact contributing to the history of oppression through its various strategies and practices.³²

The appropriation and "sanitization" of Native American history is typical of Disney. The use of real people to do so is just a more recent strategy. According to Fjellman (1992), Walt Disney created a fantasy in which

the past was cleaned up—"vacuum cleaned," in Mike Wallace's words. Unpleasantries would be dropped from history, and stories of the past would be told in carefully (and commercially) re-mythologized form to which Americans were becoming accustomed through the movies and television. (p. 59)

Disney commodifies the past into digestible bits of information for the U.S. palate—"pieces of history as pastiche designed and marketed to assuage our nostalgia" (Fjellman, 1992, p. 60).³³ Indeed, *Pocahontas* transforms an historical abomination into kid's candy—genocide into a contemporary romance. The social conditions of Native Americans in U.S. society today fall, as they so often do in mainstream U.S. society, to the wayside.

In her essay, "Cultural Imperialism and the Marketing of Native America," Laurie Anne Whitt (1995) argues that dominant culture has traditionally marketed Native American culture, especially Native American spirituality. Euro-American culture has made a habit of "appropriating, mining, and redefining what is distinctive" and con-

stitutive of Native Americans (p. 2). This strategy of appropriation relies on culturally specific views of ownership and property rights and is an act of subordinating Native Americans to Euro-American culture. U.S. companies and individuals appropriate, and by doing so exploit, "literary, artistic, scholarly, and commercial products" to be circulated in popular culture for the cultural elite (p. 3). As Whitt (1995) suggests:

A form of oppression exerted by a dominant society upon other cultures, and typically a source of economic profit, cultural imperialism secures and deepens the subordinated status of those cultures. In the case of indigenous cultures, it undermines their integrity and distinctiveness, assimilating them to the dominant culture by seizing and processing vital cultural resources, then remaking them in the image and market-places of dominant culture. (p. 3)

Whitt summarizes Ward Churchill on the overall logic of such appropriation through commodification of Native American culture. Based on Ward Churchill's work (e.g., 1992), Whitt suggests that those who appropriate use what they have stolen, feel good about the act of stealing (which they understand to be "inclusion"), legitimize and maintain colonial privilege, and then divert attention away from the consequences of such behavior. This logic may explain the way Disney sought to construct the image of Pocahontas.

An article in the *Washington Post* about the film *Pocahontas* supports Whitt's conclusions. The story speculates on the possibility that Little Dove Custolow, like Pocahontas also a daughter of a Powhatan chief, was a model and consultant for the film (Faiola, 1995). This article is interesting because it suggests that Custolow,

who traces her family back to Pocahontas,³⁴ criticizes the film's portrayal of Pocahontas and briefly points to the appropriation of Native American history. The article also suggests that "Disney, which labored to avoid ethnic stereotyping by hiring a host of Indians on the four-year project, argues that the exact details of the Pocahontas legend remain vague at best—*making it a perfect piece of history to mold*" (p. A28, our emphasis). The article quotes Peter Schneider, president of Walt Disney Studios' animation division, as saying:

We set out to do something inspired by the legend, not to make a documentary. . . . But you've got to remember something important. The history of Pocahontas is, in and of itself, a source of much controversy. Nobody knows the truth of her legend. We simply set out to make a beautiful movie about the Native American experience. (p. A28)

The article then depicts Disney as worried about its image in depicting "ethnic or other minorities in films" and suggests Disney is sensitive to criticism of racism in its films such as *Aladdin*: "To authenticate *Pocahontas*, Indians were used as screen voices and as consultants for the film's elaborate dance and music scenes" (p. A28).

As this article suggests, Native Americans are only useful to Disney insofar as they provide information, images, and a commodifiable "sense of reality." As Whitt (1995) argues, the cumulative weight of the historical practice of cultural appropriation "suggests that cultural imperialism, in its late capitalist mode, requires a legitimating rationale, one that enables the dominant culture to mask the fundamentally oppressive nature of its treatment of subordinated cultures" (p. 8).

Conclusion

As we suggest in this study, the cipher functions as an efficient mechanism that facilitates and centralizes the various processes of appropriation and commodification. Disney and others used to recast Native Americans within a western, capitalist frame. Commodification, itself, is a process in which the cipher serves an integral role, perhaps explaining why the consumption of commodities cannot, by themselves, fully satisfy the desire to have them. To criticize the cipher as we define it here involves examining multitudinous meanings located within and revolving around that nodal point. Because, in its ubiquity, the commodity field of Pocahontas is made of multitudinous products, the primary reason for its desirability as an image is difficult to isolate. Because the cipher is never fixed, never fully seen in its totality, and always changing, it becomes increasingly difficult but all the more necessary to pinpoint and evaluate, as our shifting analysis of trash, products, marketing, and popular discourse suggests.

To illustrate this point we return to our earlier discussion of trash, in which we discuss the discovery of several pieces of Burger King trash referencing and citing the form and the movie (where form and film become indistinguishable) of Pocahontas. The trash we found, creeping up the steps to our home, while uninvited, was also inescapable. Indeed, near the end of the summer one of us, on a "nature walk," came across a purple Burger King cup, smashed and dusty, but still emblazoned with the movie's characters. The everyday inescapability from products and their advertisements, the cultural ubiquity of the production of Pocahontas, and the colonial denaturalization

that separates the product from the historical figure and even from the film itself culminate when the commodity form reimbues trash with exchange value. The trash of Pocahontas aids in the construction of a cipher abstracted from any particular historical moment and defined instead as a product—a consumable object. Trash, the antithesis of a commodity, because it territorializes our landscape, becomes commodified. Fjellman (1992) suggests that, like trash, "Advertising rhetoric needs to be constructed so as to intrude into consumer's minds, to colonize mental space with metaphorical neon signs" (p. 305). Trash is a form of advertising rhetoric. It pervades our landscape and presents an inescapable commodified form.

Furthermore, the process is defined by the desire for the exotic—the unattainable. The cipher creates differences for the purpose of new style—replete with false hopes and imaginations directed at children and adults, as Hamid Naficy and Teahome H. Gabriel (1991) argue. They note that by "coopting differences [and] effacing histories and conflictual relations of forces, multinational corporatism tends to map out alterity as mere difference to be consumed as style" (p. ii). In the case of Pocahontas, as with no doubt many other figures marketed to consumers, such as the more contemporary Mulan, her commodification takes place in the fetishization of her gender, sexualized form, and race. The commodity field of Pocahontas continually exchanges, without use value, her exotic character, her dark skin—or what Susan Willis (1991) refers to as the "beige woman" (p. 120)—her new-age womanhood, her colonial subjectivity, her over-determined communion

with nature, and her eccentric "beauty." All the while, the field creates Pocahontas as interchangeable, substitutable, and replaceable—translatable into any and every (colonial and masculine) desire. Further still, this process of commodification—the proliferation of the commodity form—envelopes new territory generally undifferentiated from the mass consumer culture: trash.

Recognizing the cipher as a component of contemporary capitalism challenges us to rethink not only our relationships to products, images, and representations, but to the current role of images themselves. Rethinking these relationships allows us to see how images relate to products and how overattention to products distracts attention

from the processes that those products draw on to create social meanings. Our purpose in this study is to expose the cipher—to locate it through analysis of products and discourses and, at least momentarily, to pinpoint it so as to make the cipher intransigent and immobile. Through the act of pinpointing the cipher, we engage in a process of "de-ciphering." This involves unpackaging the commodified figure of Pocahontas even while all around us cultural practices continually absorb and package that form. As such, through this approach to criticism, we offer a practice that resists cultural processes that exceed our abilities to make immediate sense of them. □

Notes

¹Of course, political economy research is by no means new in media studies. See, for example, Eileen Meehan (1991) and Janet Wasko (1994). But, renewed interest in the political economy by critics oriented toward textual criticism has emerged recently, as suggested by the list of researchers cited here.

²By a "materialist perspective" we mean privileging effects that actions and representations have on people in their daily lives, which includes economic concerns. Furthermore, such a standpoint takes into consideration the experiences of those with the least amount of privilege in a society. For instance, a *New York Times* article discusses the fact that the gala premiere of *Pocahontas* on the Great Lawn in New York's Central Park made the park virtually unusable for three days (Lee, F. R., 1995b, p. 23). Litter from the 100,000 people who attended the event made it impossible for people to use the space; and it took two extra days to remove refuse. A materialist perspective would focus on the perspective of the workers who clean up the park (e.g., see Trujillo, 1992, for a relevant study, focusing on seemingly "invisible" workers' perspectives at gala public events), the city's use of a public park for a Disney commercial event, the racial and gender makeup of the crowd, and perhaps on the negative impact the event might have on, for example, homeless people for whom part of the park is their home.

³One story in the *Wall Street Journal* suggests that most consultants thought the movie would not do as well as *The Lion King*; however, the article also cites some sources as optimistic that the film would do even better (King, 1995, p. B1).

⁴Pre-release ads for the film, the release itself, and the March 1996 video release marked significant discursive moments in the overall marketing of *Pocahontas*. The film played at local and regional theaters. Local, regional, and national newspapers published articles and reviews of the film. National magazines, available locally, printed articles about *Pocahontas* and the film. Nevertheless, Disney's selling strategy went well beyond marketing and distributing the film, as we will show.

⁵For some history on the relationship between marketing goods to children and mass media, see Tom Englehardt (1986), Marsha Kinder (1991), and Stephen Kline (1993).

⁶Indeed, Burger King's *Pocahontas* media blitz outdid that of Burger King's *Lion King* ad campaign the year before, which was already its largest campaign ever (Gellene, 1995, p. D1).

⁷For a study of the film, see Derek T. Buescher and Kent A. Ono, 1996.

⁸For another discussion of the cipher, see Elizabeth Bell (1995).

⁹Many theories rely on the logic that meanings are "contained" in objects, versus ascribed to them. Even those somewhat critical of such a model, such as Sut Jhally (1994), sometimes take such a perspective (e.g., p. 51).

¹⁰We are not suggesting Pocahontas existed *only* in Native American culture prior to Disney's film; for example, high school textbooks might include stories based on the figure of Pocahontas. However, we are suggesting Disney's film marked a shift in degree for Pocahontas's representation in mainstream culture. She becomes a figure almost completely disconnected from any material referent.

¹¹The cipher is perhaps perfectly adaptable to the world of animation. The ability to draw Pocahontas reinforces the cipher effect where Pocahontas is continuously reinvented and "inscribed" as a cel figure with multiple, and sometimes contradictory, manifestations. Animation, which functions purely by means of form, can be used to refer to objects of everyday life. Animated figures that reference human beings depend on a momentary suspension of disbelief in which forms and figures are metaphors for humans—imprints without oil.

¹²This appropriative move to narrate the history of Native Americans in order to confirm and provide a therapeutic rhetoric for the neocolonialist consciousness is neither a new, nor a particularly innovative tactic. In historical cultural politics, such representations as Sacajawea (the name of the Junior High School one of us attended), the willing colonialist scout, litter the popular cultural and historical landscape. Characters who aided colonialists in their invasion and slaughters of Native American people, albeit with the best intentions, not only abound within historical and contemporary discourse, but as a result have come to define, within the space of popular film, television, and literature, what Native American identity is (e.g., on television, Tonto of *The Lone Ranger*; Nakuma of *The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams*; and Mirmanee, Kirk's wife, who gets pregnant and dies in the *Star Trek* episode, "This Side of Paradise").

¹³For a concurrent definition, see Bell (1995, pp. 108–109).

¹⁴See, for instance, Judith Williamson (1978).

¹⁵Indeed, one could use the concept of the cipher to examine the commodity culture produced in relation to the film character Batman. Andrew Ross (1990) conducts a similar study to our own examining the many Batman products and their use by consumers.

¹⁶At least one news media source referred to the ubiquity of Pocahontas products available. A picture in the *New York Times* shows a girl looking at a display of Pocahontas books and other merchandise in a department store. The caption reads, "Pocahontas merchandise seems to be everywhere in the wake of the premiere of the Disney movie 'Pocahontas.' A girl checked out some of the items at The Disney Store in Galleria Mall in White Plains" (Harris, 1995, p. A16).

¹⁷Discourse and products about Pocahontas in our hometown, a town of approximately 50,000 people, were significant during the summer of 1995.

¹⁸Because the original soundtrack had instrumental portions not directed toward children, Disney produced and marketed "Sing-along Pocahontas," containing only songs with lyrics (Campbell, 1995, p. 12).

¹⁹Recent communication research has focused on marketing aimed specifically at children (see, for instance, Alexander & Morrison, 1995; Miller & Rode, 1995; Pecora, 1995; and Steiner, 1995).

²⁰We considered calling this section "The Sexualized Native American Barbie," but since the sexualized gaze is at a child, that (as we will show) *men* are invited to gaze at her and children even younger than the fictional Pocahontas are invited to play with and imitate Pocahontas's sexualized body, we choose to emphasize the excessive and illicit nature of this sexualization with the term "pornographic." Additionally, explicit references to, for example, *Playboy* emerge in the discourse. For an analysis of the complex problem of defining and responding to pornography from a feminist perspective, see Jane Juffer (1998) and Lynn S. Chancer (1998).

²¹This is not to suggest that there were not racist reactions to the film, as well. For instance, some

titles rely on overtly derogating depictions of Native Americans, such as Michael Lind's (1995) "Dishonest Injun" and Joe Morgenstern's (1995) "Film: Disney's Cartoon Squaw." As we have been doing throughout the paper, in this section we will continue to address ways the sexualization of Pocahontas is connected to race.

²²Barbie also is a cipher, a cipher to which Pocahontas refers. In an aside, M. G. Lord (1994) writes, "Unless I am discussing the doll as a sculpture, I will use 'she' to refer to Barbie; Barbie is made up of two distinct components: the doll-as-physical-object and the doll-as-invented personality" (p. 4). Our discussion so far suggests Pocahontas has these two components and myriad more.

²³For various accounts, see Ann Ducille (1994), Lord (1994), and Erica Rand (1995).

²⁴Our discussion of the comparison of Pocahontas to Barbie parallels that of Jacqueline Urla and Alan C. Swedlund's (1995) regarding Mattel's attempt to make Barbie "multicultural." They astutely note that in the line-up of Barbie dolls of color "Cultural difference is reduced to surface variations of skin tone and costumes that can be exchanged at will . . . 'difference' is remarkably made over into sameness, as ethnicity is tamed to conform to a restricted range of feminine beauty" (p. 284).

²⁵The article makes other comparisons as well, e.g.: "Move over Barbie. This year, if the Walt Disney Company has its way, the queen of the toy kingdom will have to share the throne of plastic pulchritude with Pocahontas" (Louie, 1995, p. B4). The article goes on to say that "Pocahontas the doll is sexy, wearing what no Native American 11-year-old would have worn in the early 17th century—a one-shouldered fake deerskin halter top with a matching metallic fringed skirt (\$16). Better yet, a long glossy mane of black hair that plunges to her knees."

²⁶A similar title heads Woody Hochswender's (1995) article, "Pocahontas: Babe in the woods." Pictures of the cartoon-like Pocahontas modeling, for example, an evening dress (with fur stole) and a business suit—all tight fitting—line the pages of the article.

²⁷Caryn James (1995) and Nicole Arthur (1995) discuss sexualizing aspects of Pocahontas during production that did not make it to the screen. This is evident, for example, in Arthur's comparison of Pocahontas to other Disney film heroines. She writes, "Where Snow White was essentially asexual, Pocahontas is aggressively sexual—so much so that the *New York Times* referred to her as 'an animated Playboy Playmate.' And Pocahontas is not just a babe, she's a superbabe" (p. G5). She also discusses a scene not shown in the movie in which Pocahontas "cavorted with the shirtless Smith." The scene "was deemed too *racy* and was cut from the film" (p. G5, our emphasis). She also suggests that Pocahontas was modeled "in part on supermodel Christy Turlington" (p. G5). For a critical perspective on Pocahontas's relationship to other Disney heroines, please see Bell's (1995) article on the development of bodies from Disney's 1937 version of *Snow White* to the body of Jasmine in its 1992 film *Aladdin*.

²⁸Ironically, according to one *New York Times* article (Ramirez, 1995), production of the final animated Pocahontas figure seen in the film was a composite sketch of 15 real women, including "Jamie Pillow from Pasadena Art Center; Natalie Belcon, a black woman whom Mr. Keane's son met at a martial arts class, and Charmaine Craig, an American Indian actress who appears in the film *White Fang 2*" (p. C2). According to the article, Glen Keane, the supervising animator for *Pocahontas*, says that Dyna Taylor, a 21-year-old college student, was the main model for Pocahontas. Keane conducted four modeling sessions with her "held intermittently over three years, during which she was extensively sketched and videotaped. At one point, 15 animators surrounded her and sketched her face from a variety of angles" (p. C2). According to Keane, Taylor helped inspire him to create Pocahontas; he used Taylor for her face and "these other women . . . for 'live-action reference'—in other words, for Pocahontas's body when she was shown running, jumping and walking—and only partly for the character's face" (p. C2).

²⁹Susan Bordo (1993) develops a concept of plasticity in relation to contemporary fashion culture focusing on gender and race.

³⁰For a discussion of how the film differs from a narrative that circulates within Native American culture, see Donald K. Sharpe (1995).

³¹See, also, Fredric Jameson (1979/1980).

³²As Laurie Anne Whit (1995) suggests, "Whatever its form, cultural imperialism often plays a

diversionary role that is politically advantageous, for it serves to extend—while effectively diverting attention from—the continued oppression of indigenous peoples” (p. 4).

³³See also Henry A. Giroux (1995) who writes that “the Disney Company has become synonymous with a notion of innocence that aggressively rewrites the historical and collective identity of the American past” (p. 45).

³⁴The tradition of connecting one’s genealogy to Pocahontas is a rich one. Wayne Newton said he was a descendent of Pocahontas on *The Charles Grodin Show*, and an article in *Time* magazine compares a picture of Newton to one of Pocahontas, whose hair covers Newton’s midsection, with this article title: “And They Both Sing Too!” (Luscombe, 1995, p. 61). Susan Donnell (1991), who alleges a direct biological relationship to the famed princess, produced a romantic saga of Pocahontas’s life and affair with John Smith as a novel called *Pocahontas*. In the vein of Harlequin romances, *Pocahontas* emphasizes the conventions of melodrama and downplays the overtly aggressive physicality of the animated film character. People interested in our study told us they were direct descendants as well.

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